

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

136 have any fear of beasts. For, with the exception of man himself, the dog and pig which he has brought, the rat which came in his rafts or canoes, and the fruit bats that may have arrived nestling among his provisions, no mammals of any kind have reached these islands from the land-masses where they evolved. Thus, the native lives free from the fear of animals, or of anything worse than the climate, the mosquitoes, the hurricanes which sometimes spoil his crops or wreck his canoes; and the only living things he is ever called on to defend himself against are other men, as will be seen in the chapter on Warfare. Even the snakes are harmless—although the fear of them is great, owing largely to psychological causes taken advantage of by certain magicians said to have power to change themselves into these creatures, and possibly partly also to a racial memory of continental origin where snakes are physically harmful.

DISTRICTS OF MALEKULA

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619 The origin of the name Malekula is obscure. Though now used by those of the younger natives who have been on plantations and speak pidgin-English, there is no known native dialect to which it belongs. Dr. Ivens suggests that the first half of the word, which corresponds with that of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, means simply "people," and points out that in both islands overt descent is patrilineal, while their neighbours are for the most part matrilineal.¹ However this may be, no natives of any part of Malekula today possess any name for the whole island. This may be due partly to the restricted nature of their geographical knowledge,² but may also be attributed to the complete lack of any cohesion, either political or linguistic, or even racial, of the innumerable small groups that form its scattered population.

131 It is not my intention to attempt here any but the briefest survey of the cultures of Malekula, an island with an area of about 780 square miles (that is to say about half the size of Cornwall, which it resembles somewhat in shape), where, apart from other cultural differences, the languages are so numerous that each group of villages speaks a distinct dialect of its own sufficiently different from that of its neighbours that a journey of three miles often takes one into an entirely distinct linguistic area. So unknown are most parts of Malekula still today, and so intricate the mountain ranges that intersect it, that few parts of the interior have even been visited by a white man, and almost the whole of our very limited knowledge of it is confined to a few of the coastal districts.

¹ Ivens, 3, p. 20.

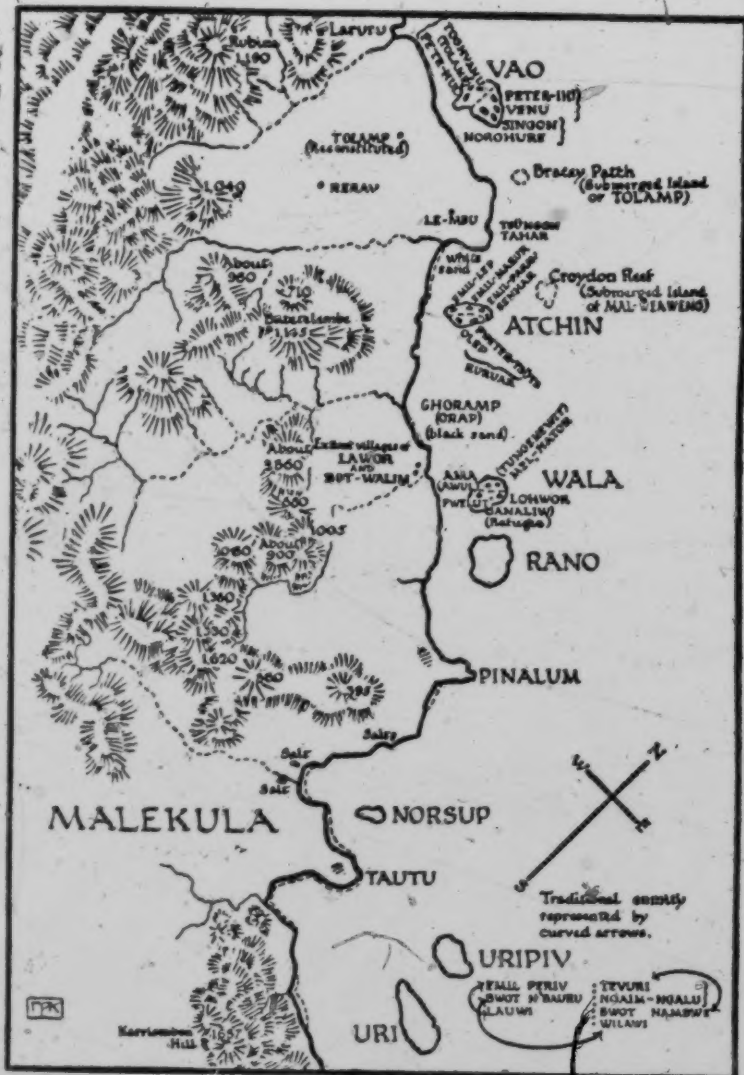
² This statement may seem strange in view of the existence of sea-going canoes. It is a fact, however, that in spite of their voyages to other islands over what I have termed the inland sea, not even traditions exist of any Small Island canoe having ever sailed round Malekula.

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

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MAP II

Sketch-map of the Small Islands.

CHAPTER III

OVERT SOCIAL ORGANISATION

THE SMALL ISLANDS AS A CULTURAL UNIT

IN the brief survey contained in the last chapter, we met with several factors of sociological significance: 571

The division of the island into two unequal Sides.

The fact that the six Vao villages, each with its own dancing-ground, are paired in such a way as to form three double-villages, one double-village on one Side of the Island and two double-villages on the other.

Sex dichotomy as one of the means by which the men maintain a position of ritual superiority over the women.

The existence of a central village men's house (*ghamal*) and of Family-Lodges (*na-tamp*) surrounded by the family cemeteries, into which women not born in the village may never enter and those born in the village may enter only on stated occasions.

(Godefroy also reports the existence of special Lodges in which women give birth to children and to which men have no access.)

In order properly to understand the meaning of these phenomena it is necessary first to examine the social organisation of Vao not as a unit in itself, but as part of the larger unit formed by the Small Islands as a whole. 619

Despite considerable differences in language, in the regulation of kinship and in ritual, and the not infrequent wars that break out between them, the inhabitants of all these and of the adjacent promontories recognise a common cultural bond. There is, however, no political cohesion. Nor, in the absence of chiefs, is there any centralised form of control or common action.

Within this cultural unit the inhabitants of each island and promontory included in it may severally be spoken of as constituting a "tribe" in the commonly accepted sense that they inhabit a definite locality, speak a common language, have a common name for themselves, and in spite of intermarriage exhibit a sense of solidarity which expresses itself in regarding other people as strangers,¹ though in no case does the population

¹ The only possible exception to this is that of Wala and Rano, which lie very close to one another and in some respects act as a single unit.

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

619 of any single Small Island today greatly exceed 400,¹ and that of the two promontories is considerably less. I shall, however, in the following pages make only very occasional use of this term, since the natives' own habit of referring to themselves by the names of their islands or promontories is equally exact and has the advantage of conforming with their own methods of thought.

621 The population of each Small Island is divided into a number of
611 patrilineal villages in which descent is overtly patrilineal, marriage being
613 regulated at first sight on a simple basis of local patrilineal exogamy. The exogamous patrilineal unit may consist of:

- (1) A single-village.
- (2) A double-village, sometimes comprising the whole of one Side of the Island.
- (3) A group of villages comprising a whole island, as on Wala.²

Thus, in each unit formed of a single-village, double-village or group of villages, the population is made up of males all claiming descent from a common ancestor or ancestors in the male line, together with their wives, and their unmarried sisters and daughters. According to the rule of patrilineal exogamy with patrilocal residence, no man may marry any woman born in his own village or group of villages and who could thus claim common ancestry with him in the male line. Thus, every woman on marriage leaves the village in which she was born and goes to live in that of her husband, and the children born of the marriage belong to the husband's patrilineal kin. The patrilineal kin is thus a clan in the true sense of the term, with the men all congregated in their own ancestral patrilineal village and the women seeking husbands outside. The system embraces the whole area under consideration, since marriages take place not only with members of other villages on the same island (except in the case of Wala), but also with those of other Small Islands, as well as of the villages on the adjacent mainland of Malekula.

This pronounced system of overt patrilineal exogamy has given rise to the prevailing opinion that descent in these islands, as in other parts of Malekula, is purely "patrilineal." That this overt patrilineal organisation forms, however, only one aspect of the social scheme, will be seen clearly when we come to examine the kinship systems of the various islands.³

What has been said is enough for the moment to demonstrate the interdependence of all the Small Island communities and the dominance of the patrilineal principle in the regulation of residence.

With this common background, let us now briefly survey the social organisation of the various islands with regard to the arrangement and inter-relation of their villages.

¹ For exact numbers see Appendix I, pp. 745 ff.

² See footnote on p. 56.

³ See Chapters V and VI.